

## Umair Asif, Diocesan Racial Diversity Enabler

I wonder if you've ever gone to buy one thing and come home with seventeen.

You walk into the supermarket for milk and somehow leave with candles, biscuits, a garden hose, and something called "artisan Himalayan sea salt crackers" that you didn't know existed five minutes earlier.

Sometimes life gets complicated because we make it complicated.

The prophet Micah asks a question that sounds surprisingly modern: "What does God actually want from me?" Do I need bigger sacrifices? More religious activity? More impressive worship? More performance?

"Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." Justice. Mercy. Humility.

Jesus says something remarkably similar in Luke's Gospel when he stands in the synagogue, reads from Isaiah, and announces that God's Spirit has anointed him to bring good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, and sight to the blind. Then he sits down and says, in effect, "This isn't just a reading. This starts now. And it starts with me."

It's a dangerous sermon, actually. In fact, if you keep reading Luke's account, people become so angry they want to throw Jesus off a cliff. Which is comforting for anyone preaching today. If you don't like this sermon, at least let's keep things proportionate.

Micah and Jesus both remind us that faith is never just about what happens in a building. It's about what happens when we leave it.

It's one thing to sing beautifully. It's another thing to love sacrificially. It's one thing to know Scripture. It's another to live it.

And before I go any further, I should say this: I know this church has spent time this year thinking about justice through Amos and has been willing to engage in conversations about racial justice and unconscious bias. That willingness matters. Learning is itself an act of humility.

But here's the challenge. Most injustice isn't carried out by cartoon villains twirling their moustaches. It's often ordinary people, doing ordinary things, without stopping to ask ordinary questions.

We all have blind spots. I certainly do. The funny thing about unconscious bias is that the clue is in the name. If it were conscious, we'd probably do something about it.

It's a bit like having spinach stuck in your teeth. Everyone else can see it but you can't. And you really need a kind friend to tell you before the photographs are taken.

Humility means accepting that we might have spinach in our metaphorical teeth.

The Bible never asks us to pretend we're perfect. It invites us to become teachable.

That's why Micah doesn't simply say "do justice." He also says "walk humbly."

Because humble people keep learning. Humble people listen before they defend. Humble people ask questions before making assumptions.

Humble people are willing to hear someone else's experience without immediately explaining it away. When we talk about racial injustice, that posture matters enormously.

For many of us, especially if we haven't personally experienced discrimination because of our ethnicity, it can be tempting to think, "Well, I've never intended harm."

If someone accidentally stands on your foot, they may not have meant to hurt you, but your toes are still in trouble.

The Christian response isn't to argue about intent while you're hopping around in pain. It's to apologise, help, and pay more attention next time.

Justice begins with listening. Mercy continues with compassion. Humility keeps us growing. And all three point us towards Christ.

Jesus didn't simply preach good news. He embodied it. He crossed boundaries and welcomed outsiders. He touched those others avoided. He spoke with people society dismissed. Again and again, he expanded people's understanding of who belonged in God's family.

The good news of the Gospel is not that some people are invited to the table. It's that Christ keeps making the table bigger.

And here's the encouraging part. Micah doesn't say we have to solve every problem in the world before lunch. He doesn't tell us to fix every injustice by ourselves. He tells us how to walk. One step at a time. One conversation. One act of kindness. Those small acts, repeated faithfully, become a life of justice and mercy.

As Christians, our calling isn't simply to avoid doing wrong. It's to actively do right. To not just not be racist but be anti-racist. To notice the overlooked. To welcome the stranger. To challenge unfairness. To reflect the character of the God we worship.

Because ultimately, Micah 6 and Luke 4 aren't giving us two separate messages. They're telling one story.

The God who requires justice is the God who became flesh. The God who loves mercy is the God who forgives sinners. The God who calls us to humility is the God who humbled himself for us. So may we leave this place not asking, "How little can I do?" but "Lord, how can I reflect your justice, your mercy, and your humility today?"

And if we do that, then perhaps the people around us won't just hear the Gospel from our lips. They'll catch a glimpse of it in our lives. Amen.